

**PhD dissertation summary**

# Interrogative words and content questions in Tundra Nenets

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# 1. Introduction

The aim of this study is to provide a description of Tundra Nenets (Northern Samoyedic, Uralic) content questions. Traditionally, content questions are described as questions which (i) require a specific answer other than ‘Yes/No’ and (ii) contain an interrogative phrase (cf. Dryer 2013). The set of the interrogative words seems to be universal in the known languages, or at least there is a set of elements that is used in content questions for substituting unknown information. Studies on interrogatives usually discuss inherent properties of interrogative words that may vary from language to language, some of which are detailed below in 1–3:

1. the semantic gaps encoded by interrogative words (see e.g. Cysouw 2004; 2005);
2. the grammatical categories of the interrogative words, *i.e.* what parts-of-speech categories they belong to;
3. the syntactic position of the interrogative words (see e.g. Greenberg 1966; Siemund 2001; Dryer 2013).

These distinctions above raise the following questions as regards Tundra Nenets interrogatives:

- (i) What meanings are encoded in the set of Tundra Nenets interrogative words? How are the available semantic categories encoded in Tundra Nenets? Which lexemes are simplex and which are compound (or phrases) within the synchronic structure of the language? What parts are compound lexemes made from? Which categories use the same lexemes?
- (ii) Which word classes do Tundra Nenets interrogative words belong to? Do the interrogative words form a grammatically homogenous set? What kind of inflectional categories are there available for the interrogative words? What is the distribution of the different interrogative words? What kind of syntactic functions can be filled by interrogative words in Tundra Nenets?
- (iii) What is the position of interrogative words in Tundra Nenets? Is there a dedicated syntactic position available for interrogative phrases? In addition, is there only one available syntactic position for Tundra Nenets interrogatives or are there several? In other words, does Tundra Nenets allow interrogative phrases to occur in various structural positions? Do the interrogative phrases appear in positions other than the expected ones only under special circumstances? What are these special circumstances?

Although, there are proposals which attempt to answer the questions in (ii) and/or some of those in (iii), the questions in (i) have not been addressed at all. The present study aims at answering the questions raised in (i)–(iii) above.

## 1.1. The Tundra Nenets language

Tundra Nenets is traditionally considered to be a Northern Samoyedic (Uralic) language, which is a fairly endangered language spoken in the North-Eastern part of Europe and in the North-Western part of Siberia by less than 20,000 people. Speakers live in three major administrative districts: the Nenets District, the Yamal Nenets District and the Taymyr Municipal District, and a few more groups of speakers can sporadically be found in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous District, in the Komi Republic and in the Murmansk region.

The official state language of the Russian Federation is the Russian language, which is predominantly used in the domain of everyday life and education of Tundra Nenets people. Besides the Russian language, other indigenous minorities with their own languages can be found in the traditional territories of Tundra Nenets. These minority languages may influence and may be influenced by the Tundra Nenets language. Khanty, Mansi and Selkup speakers can be found in the Yamal Nenets District, while Nganasan, Tundra and Forest Enets, Dolgan (Turkic), Ket (Yeniseic) and Evenki (Northern Tungusic) speakers live in the Taymyr Peninsula. Additionally, a relatively large number of Komi speakers live in the European part of the Tundra Nenets territories, in the Nenets District.

The Tundra Nenets language is often regarded in the literature as being the main prestige dialect of the Nenets language. The other so-called dialectal group of Nenets is the Forest Nenets language. These language groups, i.e. Forest and Tundra Nenets, show significant differences as regards their phonological and their lexical properties, as well as their grammatical structures (for further details, see e.g. Hajdú 1968: 17–20). Due to the many significant differences between these two language groups it makes sense to consider them as separate languages. In addition, the Tundra Nenets language itself consists of three main dialectal groups namely the Western, the Central and the Eastern groups. Within them, one can distinguish further (sub)dialects.

The writing system of Tundra Nenets is based on the Cyrillic alphabet. There are also Latin based linguistic transcriptions used in grammatical descriptions (e.g. Hajdú 1968; Salminen 1998; Staroverov 2006; Nikolaeva 2014; a.o.) that are not unified.

Tundra Nenets is a typical SOV language in which the order of the minor elements relative to each other correlates with the order of the major constituents. Consequently, the adjective precedes the noun it modifies, as well as, the possessor precedes the possessed noun, etc. The major word classes distinguished in Tundra Nenets are nouns, adjectives (and numerals), adverbs and verbs. Additionally, other parts-of-speech categories, such as pronouns, determiners, etc. can also be found in the language.

Although a significant number of linguistic description of Tundra Nenets may, at first sight, appear, the language can be considered as a poorly documented and described language compared with the other Samoyedic or Finno-Ugric languages. This is particularly true for the syntax of Tundra Nenets, since there are two grammars available which focus on the description and analysis of the Tundra Nenets clauses (see Tereshchenko 1973 and Nikolaeva 2014). Despite the fact that these grammars describe the basic grammar of the main clause-types found in Tundra Nenets, comprehensive analyses of content questions are not provided. In addition, there are grammar books (e.g. Kupriyanova et al. 1957, Almazova 1961) used in primary schools, which do not satisfy the criteria for modern linguistic descriptions. These

sources in question, furthermore, may provide the results of analyses based on historical data since the investigations summarised were carried out at least 50 years ago. In summary, my main aim is to remedy the deficiencies in the literature in respect of content questions in Tundra Nenets.

## 1.2. Previous research on Tundra Nenets content interrogatives

Four basic clause types are distinguished in Tundra Nenets relative to their conversational use, i.e. to the speech acts they are associated with: declarative, imperative/directive, interrogative and exclamative clauses (cf. Tereshchenko 1973: 87–100; Nikolaeva (2014: 194–223; 265–272). According to the literature, content questions can be characterized by the following properties:

- (i) interrogative intonation
- (ii) interrogative verb morphology
- (iii) interrogative words

Nikolaeva (2014: 267) mentions that content questions in Tundra Nenets are typically accompanied by raising intonation. While Tereshchenko (1973: 91) observed a correlation between the intonation pattern and the position of the interrogative phrases.

Furthermore, Tundra Nenets marks its content questions through an affix attached to the predicate verb, but this marker is used only in the past tense.

Finally, there are interrogative substitutes in content questions. A few interrogative word types have already been observed in the literature to typically occur in Tundra Nenets, such as the category of interrogative pronouns, adjectives, quantifiers, determiners, adverbs and verbs. However, there have only been descriptions of the grammatical characteristics of interrogative pronouns. Other interrogative words are only mentioned without analysing the semantic, morphological and/or distributional differences among the elements of the inventory of interrogative words (see e.g. Kupriyanova et al. 1957: 104; Hajdú 1968: 54; Salminen 1998: 526; Burkova et al. 2010: 55–56; Nikolaeva 2014: 265–266). Additionally, Tereshchenko (1956: 190) presents formal differences within certain subdialects of Tundra Nenets.

The other aspect of content questions that is usually discussed is the position of interrogative words in the sentence. It is often stated that Tundra Nenets is a so-called *in situ* language, in which the interrogative word is not situated in a special position within the clause, but remains in the same position in which a non-interrogative word fulfilling the same grammatical function is located (cf. Salminen 1998: 543). However, while Salminen (1998) describes content questions as being *in situ*, Tereshchenko (1973: 91) notes that the interrogative pro-forms are situated either in the clause initial position or they immediately precede the predicate. This observation is supported by Nikolaeva (2014: 265), who reports on free syntactic position of interrogative words/phrases within content questions. These observations suggest that there are more syntactic positions in which Tundra Nenets interrogative words are licensed. Nikolaeva (2014: 266) claims that these positions are optional.

## 2. Methodology

This Section includes the following parts. §2.1 deals with the methods and theoretical framework used. §2.2 discusses the methodological aspects background of corpus creation.

### 2.1. Research methods and theoretical framework

The present work aims at providing a cross-linguistically valid and comparable description of content questions in Tundra Nenets, therefore mainly typological results and approaches will be discussed here. Throughout the analysis, a neutral and widely accepted terminology will be used. Since the main aim of the present discussion is to *describe* the content questions in Tundra Nenets, the theoretical framework followed here is the so-called *basic linguistic theory* elaborated by Dixon (2010a; 2010b; 2012). The basic linguistic theory is widely employed in language description, because it provides a flexible and analytic framework in terms of which the grammar of any language can be described. This theory is not a formal one, however, it has been influenced by certain formal theories, e.g. by generative grammar. Within the frame of basic linguistic theory, the language is analysed as a system in its own right via data collected with a minimum of preconceptions about the language. Considering that the present study is the first systematic analysis of content questions in Tundra Nenets, I will only concentrate on the prototypical content question type, which:

1. does not function as an echo question,
2. contains only one interrogative word/phrase and that is not an interrogative verb,
3. consists of only one non-negative predicate.

The constructions that will not be discussed in further detail later on are the following: polar questions, alternative questions, echo questions, interrogatives used as relative and/or indefinite pro-forms, wh-exclamatives, complex questions, embedded questions, negative questions, multiple questions, interrogative mood marker, and interrogative verb.

A number of grammatical features discussed in the present dissertation may also be characteristics of other (Northern) Samoyedic, Finno-Ugric, Turkic, etc. languages. In addition, a comparative analysis of the expression of content interrogatives may bring new perspectives on interrogatives and provide valuable insight for linguists working on questions. This analysis would provide new perspectives for the languages spoken in Siberia, e.g. Forest Nenets, Enets, Nganasan, Selkup, Khanty, Mansi, Dolgan, Ket, etc., in particular. However, the structure of content interrogatives is not/barely described in the languages in question. Furthermore, not many annotated corpora exist for the target languages. Therefore, this investigation and comparison may be beyond the scope of the present study.

In addition, content questions are discussed in many other Uralic languages spoken in countries other than Russia, e.g. Hungarian, Finnish, Estonian. Nevertheless, the methodology of comparison of these languages and Tundra Nenets does not appear to have any basis in fact. To conclude, the analysis of this dissertation holds only for Tundra Nenets, consequently other Uralic, Turkic, Yeniseic, etc., languages are not affected.

## 2.2. Data, sources and data collection strategies

The results discussed in the study are based on a corpus consisting of published or electronically accessible Tundra Nenets sources, which were used for extracting language data of interrogative phrases. I use the term *corpus* here for a repository of collected and structured electronic texts. Throughout the text collection process the main aim was to select texts provided by as many authors as possible from different social classes, age, sex and dialects. In addition, the goal was to design a corpus that contains a relatively representative amount of tokens and is appropriate for answering linguistically relevant questions. The collected data dominantly represent the written version of the language. The sources were, therefore, classified on the basis of their proximity to speech, as well. On the basis of Schneider (2002: 71–74), the following selection criteria were taken into account:

- (i) the identity of speaker(s) and writer(s)
- (ii) the temporal distance between speech and record and
- (iii) the reality of speech event(s)

In conclusion, the text-types given in Table 1 were selected. For the categories of texts the terminology developed by Schneider (2002) is used.

Table 1. The Tundra Nenets primary sources

Category of texts	Type of sources	Speaker–writer identity	Temporal distance speech–record	Reality of speech event
recorded	Folklore compilations	different	immediate	real, unique
imagined	Phrasebooks	identical/ different	immediate	hypothetic, unique
imagined	Methodological handbooks	identical	immediate	hypothetic, unique
imagined	Reading books	identical	immediate	hypothetic, unspecified
imagined	Textbooks	identical	immediate	hypothetic, unspecified

As it is evidenced by Table 1, the data represent two categories of texts: *recorded* texts and *imagined* texts. The so-called recorded texts are considered to be texts which are direct written recordings of a real speech event, in real time and real place in a real situation. The Tundra Nenets folklore text compilations were characterized as recorded texts. In contrast, the imagined texts were never spoken but were originally created in writing by speakers of the community. The imagined texts were divided into two subgroups. The first subgroup contains texts originally created to be spoken, i.e. *phrasebooks* and *methodological handbooks* for teachers, while the second group consists of texts prepared to be written, those are *reading books* and *textbooks*. A figure illustrating the frame of the designed Tundra Nenets corpus is provided below in Figure (1).

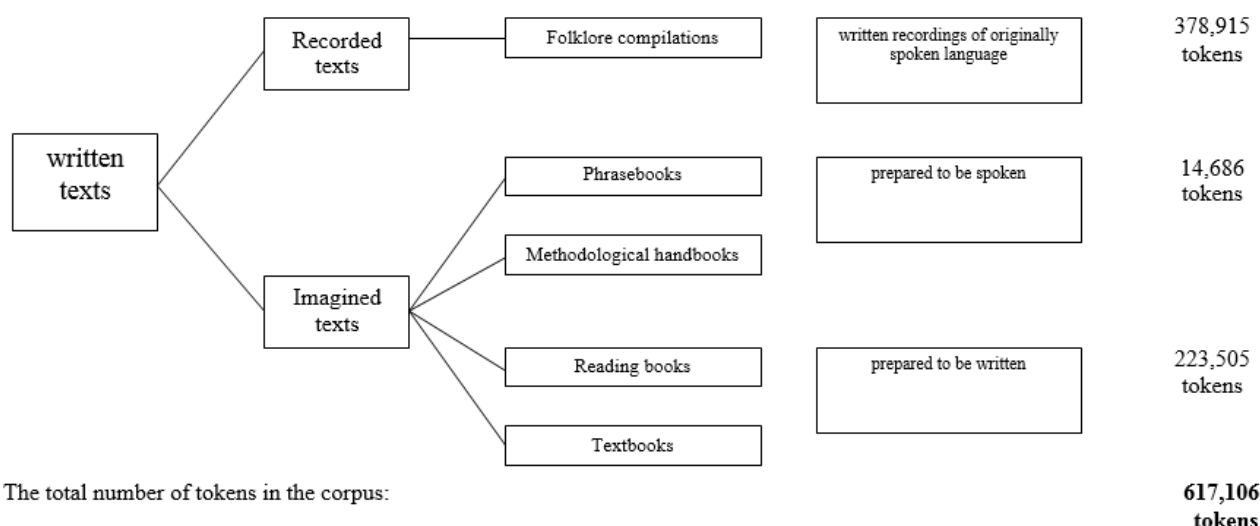


Figure 1. The sampling frame of Tundra Nenets text compilation

On the basis of the classificational criteria provided by Atkins et al. (1992), the corpus – which contains 617,106 tokens – can be categorized as a monolingual corpus containing solely Tundra Nenets texts. The printed texts were scanned and saved in machine-readable forms with an OCR (*Optical Character Recognition*) program. This format allows to make simple searches (e.g. occurrences of words or word forms), but complex information cannot be extracted from the corpus as it does not contain any explicit additional information (such as parts-of-speech tagging, etc.). The texts were converted from Cyrillic into Latin automatically by a PERL script written for this purpose.

The data (content questions) were collected manually from the corpus so collecting every occurrence (every token) of certain interrogative words was not aimed at. Rather, the types of possible occurrences of grammatical structures were gathered. The interrogative clauses were analyzed and grouped into three clause types: *intransitive*, *transitive* and *nonverbal* clauses. On the basis of Dixon (2010a: 228–229), intransitive clauses are defined here as clauses which have a single core argument, that is the intransitive subject. Additionally, transitive clauses are clauses with two core arguments, i.e. a transitive subject and a transitive object (cf. Dixon 2010a: 228–229). Finally, nonverbal clauses are treated here as clauses in which a nonverbal element functions as the predicate (cf. Payne 1997; Dryer 2007). Table 2 below illustrates the occurrences and numbers of these question types in the corpus.

Table 2. The analyzed Tundra Nenets content questions

<b>Intransitive clauses</b>	<b>Transitive clauses</b>	<b>Nonverbal clauses</b>	<b>Total</b>
595	392	507	1,494

### 3. The structure of the dissertation

The dissertation is organized as follows. Chapter 2 provides a description of the demography and ethnography of Tundra Nenets, as well as of its writing system, transcription, glossing conventions. Furthermore, the chapter gives a general overview of the syntactic and morphosyntactic features of Tundra Nenets that are relevant for the present study. Finally, Chapter 2 reviews the literature on (Tundra) Nenets and Samoyedic languages in general.

Chapter 3 concentrates on the primary data and the corpus. In addition, certain considerations and data collection strategies are discussed. In §3.1 these considerations will be presented. §3.2 discusses the methodological aspects and background of corpus creation. In this section, the available and used text types and their typical characteristics will also be dealt with. Additionally, those decisions will be discussed that were made when sampling the language. Finally, the methods and the data will be presented. In addition, the limits of the present corpus-based study will also be considered.

Chapter 4 is an overview of the general literature on interrogatives from a typological point of view. The aim of this chapter is to classify aspects which will be used in the analysis of Tundra Nenets content questions. §4.1 discusses typical clause types available in languages on the basis of the speech acts the clauses are associated with. §4.2 deals with cross-linguistic types of interrogative constructions. §4.3 discusses certain aspects of content interrogatives with respect to the availability of interrogative substitutes. Semantic categories, lexical forms, parts-of-speech categories, and the syntactic functions of the interrogative words will be considered here. Afterwards, a cross-linguistic classification of content question types on the basis of the possible syntactic positions occupied by the interrogative words will be provided. §4.4, identifies the set of those relevant constructions and elements that will be examined in the following chapters. At the same time, the chapter excludes those constructions which do not have relevancy of the study. §4.5 reviews the literature and approaches to Tundra Nenets content questions and interrogative words. Finally, §4.6. formulates numerous research questions that will be answered later in this thesis.

Chapter 5 provides the lexico-semantic categorization of Tundra Nenets interrogative words. The central problem to be addressed in the present chapter is the relation among the available semantic categories (lexical meanings) and the morphological form of the interrogative words. Following Cysouw's (2004) classification, those interrogative words will be considered as elements of the *major* category that fulfil the following criteria:

1. lexicalized and only historically analysable forms
2. identical (ambiguous) forms

Furthermore, the morphologically and the syntactically compound forms will be characterized here as elements of the minor semantic group. The formal requirements of this group are illustrated below in 1–2:

1. morphologically compound forms: an element of the major category is combined with an affix



2. syntactically compound forms: an element of the major category is combined with a postposition

Chapter 6 discusses the grammatical properties of Tundra Nenets interrogative words. Schachter & Shopen (2007: 1–2) propose an approach to identify and distinguish parts-of-speech categories, or word classes in a given language. These criteria are given in (i)–(iii).

- (i) morphological (or syntactic) categories
- (ii) syntactic function
- (iii) distribution

Chapter 6 is organized as follows. Each section starts with a dialectal differentiation of the interrogative word forms in question. Afterwards, their possible syntactic functions and the corresponding morphological characteristics, e.g. the suffixes they can take, will be discussed. Finally, those phrases and structures will be discussed in which the interrogative words may appear as complements.

Chapter 7 examines the syntactic position of interrogative phrases in intransitive, transitive and nonverbal questions.

Chapter 8 sums up the findings of this thesis.

## **4. The results**

The main findings of the dissertation are listed below.

### **4.1. The lexico-semantics of interrogative words**

Two lexico-semantic categories can be identified within the set of Tundra Nenets interrogative words: the *major* category, i.e. unanalysable forms, and the *minor* one, i.e. analysable interrogative forms. These are illustrated in Figure (2), in which the unanalysable forms are presented using bolded small capital characters, while the elements of the minor semantic group are indicated in italicized forms. Finally, the semantic ambiguities are illustrated by bolded words.

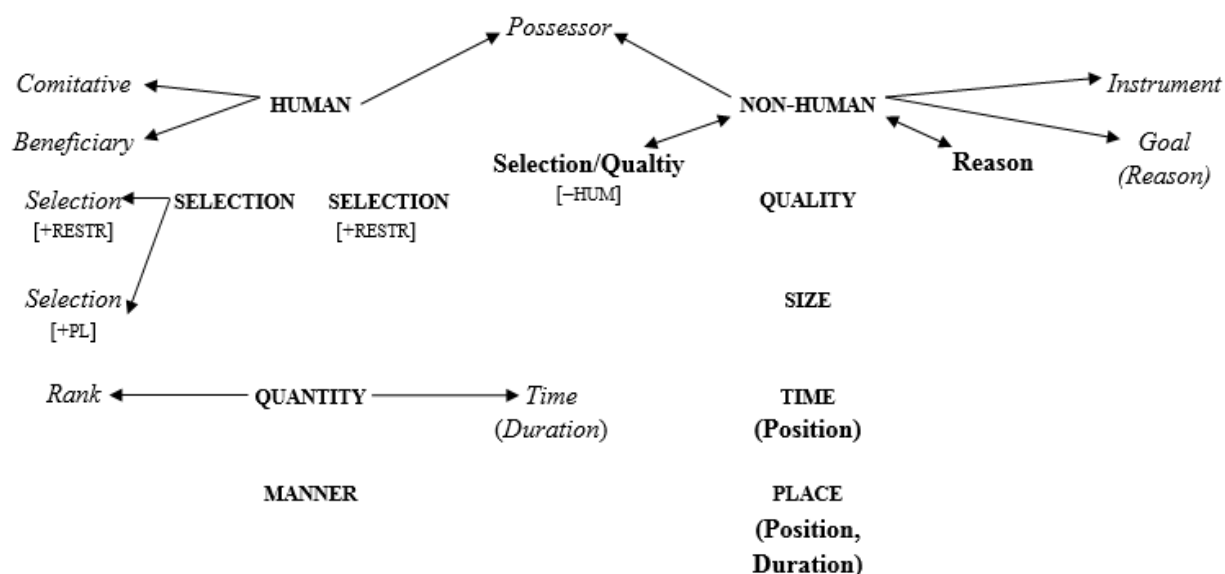


Figure 2. The lexico-typological categories of Tundra Nenets interrogative words

#### 4.2. The parts-of-speech categories of interrogative words

The semantic categories demonstrated in Chapter 5 appear as different parts-of-speech categories in clauses. The relation between the semantics and grammatical categories of Tundra Nenets interrogative words is summarized in Table 3 below.

Table 3. The relation between semantic and parts-of-speech categories of interrogative words

Semantic categories	Parts-of-speech categories
NON-SELECTIVE (HUMAN/NON-HUMAN)	Pronoun
NON-HUMAN USED FOR SELECTION/QUALITY	Adjective (restricted)
NON-HUMAN USED FOR REASON	Adverb
SELECTION	Determiner
QUALITY/SELECTION	Adjective
QUANTITY	Quantifier
TIME	Adverb
PLACE	Adverb
MANNER	Adverb

These grammatical categories have different morphological and/or syntactic characteristics illustrated in Table 4, so they appear in different syntactic functions in the clauses. Question marks have been used to indicate grammatical characters that are not attested in the corpus but are expected. Furthermore, some interrogative words seem to vary in certain Tundra Nenets dialects in which cases both + and – values have been used.

Table 4. The grammatical characteristics of interrogative words

Grammatical categories		Pronoun	‘what.qual’	‘why’	Determiner	Adjective	Quantifier	Adverb
Morphological categories	Number	+	–	–	+	+/-	–	–
	Case	+	–	–	+	+/-(?)	+/-	–
	Possessive marker	+	–	–	+	–	+(?)	–
	Benefactive marker	+	–	–	+(?)	–	+(?)	–
	Agreement marker	+	–	–	+	+	+	–
Distribution	Complement	+	–	–	–	+	+	–
	Modifier	–	+	–	+	–	–	–
	Head	+	–	–	+	–	+(?)	–
Syntactic functions	Subject	+	–	–	+(?)	–	+(?)	–
	Object	+	–	–	+(?)	–	+(?)	–
	Adverbial	+	–	+	+(?)	–	+(?)	+
	Predicate	+	–	–	+	+	+	+

As evidenced by Table 4, the use of interrogative pronouns has the least restricted distribution and morphology compared to the other interrogative pro-forms. At the other endpoint of the scale are the interrogative adverbs, which cannot take any inflectional markers at all and can only appear as adverbials and as parts of the predicate. Between these endpoints the interrogative determiners, adjectives and quantifiers are found, whose uses are grammatically more restricted than that of interrogative pronouns, but these interrogatives can be used for more syntactic functions than interrogative adverbs.

#### 4.3. The syntactic position of interrogative phrases

The central problem addressed in this chapter is the position of the (main) constituents expressed by interrogative words or phrases. The term interrogative phrase refers both to interrogative pronouns and to noun/adpositional phrases in which there is an interrogative element functioning as the head or the modifier. Typical word order patterns for Tundra Nenets clauses are provided by Salminen (1998: 543) shown in (1), and by Nikolaeva (2014: 216) illustrated in (2).

(1) Time S Location O Manner V

(2) Time S Location IO DO Manner V

Considering these possible orders of the constituents in the clauses and assuming that interrogative phrases appear *in situ*, their syntactic positions can theoretically be identified. Following certain methods provided by Cable (2010), I examined the questions available in the corpus and tested whether the interrogative phrases occupy the presumed *in situ* positions. These results of word order variations in intransitive and transitive questions are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5. The position of interrogative phrases in intransitive and transitive questions

	Content questions containing an interrogative phrase	Content questions containing an interrogative phrase and a constituent other than the predicate	Interrogative phrase remains <i>in situ</i> (from the 2nd column)	The position of the interrogative phrase does not follow from the basic word order	Rate of the non- <i>in situ</i> interrogative phrases
Intransitive clauses	595	447	313	134	<b>29.977%</b>
Transitive clauses	392	261	165	96	<b>36.782%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>987</b>	<b>708</b>	<b>478</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>67.514%</b>

Additionally, I have also examined nonverbal clauses containing an interrogative phrase. As these clause types usually contain only two constituents (with the exception of the so-called locative predicates), I focused on the possible order of the predicate and the subject. The attested variations are given in Table 6.

Table 6. The position of interrogative phrases in content questions with nonverbal predicates

	Content questions containing an interrogative phrase	Interrogative phrase remains <i>in situ</i>	The position of the interrogative phrase does not follow from the basic word order	Rate of the non- <i>in situ</i> interrogative phrases
Nonverbal clauses	507	491	15	<b>2.959%</b>

The ratio of the non-*in situ* interrogative phrases in nonverbal clauses is quite low in comparison with the two other clause types. I suppose that this data correlates with the rigid verb final characteristics of the language, so elements other than predicates can more frequently appear in non-canonical syntactic positions (see Table 6 for the ratio), whereas predicates typically occupy sentence final positions in the language.

The word order constraints observed are the followings. Firstly, only one possible order can be assumed in the case of interrogatives and verb in which the interrogatives precede the verb (see 3a–b).

### (3) Intransitive clauses/Transitive

- a. S<sub>Q</sub>/Time<sub>Q</sub>/L<sub>Q</sub>/O<sub>Q</sub>/Manner<sub>Q</sub>/Reason<sub>Q</sub>/X<sub>Q</sub>      V      standard order
- b. V      S<sub>Q</sub>/Time<sub>Q</sub>/L<sub>Q</sub>/O<sub>Q</sub>/Manner<sub>Q</sub>/Reason<sub>Q</sub>/X<sub>Q</sub>      no data

As was mentioned, this rule is the consequence of the rigid verb final characteristic of the language, therefore any (interrogative) element is not assumed after the finite verb.

Secondly, certain interrogative word types may behave differently in the clause. It means that some interrogative phrases may remain *in situ*, but others may appear in another syntactic position, for instance, sentence initially. For example, the complex interrogative phrases tend to occur clause initially. This was found, for instance, in the structures illustrated in (4)–(6).

(4) Intransitive clauses

- |    |                |                |   |    |                           |
|----|----------------|----------------|---|----|---------------------------|
| a. | Time           | S <sub>Q</sub> | V |    | standard order            |
| b. | S <sub>Q</sub> | Time           | V | IF | S <sub>Q</sub> is complex |

(5) Existential clauses

- |    |                |                |        |    |                           |
|----|----------------|----------------|--------|----|---------------------------|
| a. | L              | T <sub>Q</sub> | Vexist |    | standard order            |
| b. | T <sub>Q</sub> | L              | Vexist | IF | T <sub>Q</sub> is complex |

(6) Transitive clauses

- |    |                |                |   |    |                           |
|----|----------------|----------------|---|----|---------------------------|
| a. | Time           | O <sub>Q</sub> | V |    | standard order            |
| b. | O <sub>Q</sub> | Time           | V | IF | O <sub>Q</sub> is complex |

Thirdly, there are other rules that also influence the word order in questions, e.g. pragmatical rules. For instance, non-interrogative constituents which are referential/specific elements precede the interrogative constituent involving changes in the standard word order (see e.g. 7)

(7) Intransitive clauses

- |    |                   |                   |   |    |                  |
|----|-------------------|-------------------|---|----|------------------|
| a. | Time <sub>Q</sub> | S                 | V |    | standard order   |
| b. | S                 | Time <sub>Q</sub> | V | IF | S is referential |

Furthermore, topicalized constituents may also appear in sentence initial position in which case the basic word order is changed. In consequence, topical objects, for instance, typically appear before the subject (see e.g. 8).

(8) Transitive clauses

- |    |                |                |   |    |                  |
|----|----------------|----------------|---|----|------------------|
| a. | S <sub>Q</sub> | O              | V |    |                  |
| b. | O              | S <sub>Q</sub> | V | IF | O is topicalized |

Additionally, there are cases in which no clear evidence supports for the reversed word order, as in (9) below, in which case the reversed O<sub>Q</sub>S order may be the result of the complexity of the object interrogative word, or the subject of the clause can be the focused, as well as, Russian influence can also be supposed.

(9) Transitive clauses

- |    |                |                |   |    |                           |
|----|----------------|----------------|---|----|---------------------------|
| a. | S              | O <sub>Q</sub> | V |    | standard order            |
| b. | O <sub>Q</sub> | S              | V | IF | O <sub>Q</sub> is complex |
|    |                |                |   | OR | S is focused              |
|    |                |                |   | OR | Russian influence         |

In addition, some order variations seem to be optional like those in (10)–(11).

(10) Intransitive clauses

- |    |                     |                     |  |  |                 |
|----|---------------------|---------------------|--|--|-----------------|
| a. | S                   | Manner <sub>Q</sub> |  |  |                 |
| b. | Manner <sub>Q</sub> | S                   |  |  | optional orders |

(11) Transitive clauses

- |    |                |                |                 |
|----|----------------|----------------|-----------------|
| a. | X <sub>Q</sub> | O              |                 |
| b. | O              | X <sub>Q</sub> | optional orders |

Finally, some relative orders are not attested because they do not appear in the texts at all (see 12)–(13).

(12) Intransitive clauses

- |    |                |                |         |
|----|----------------|----------------|---------|
| a. | Reason         | S <sub>Q</sub> | no data |
| b. | S <sub>Q</sub> | Reason         | no data |

(13) Existential clauses

- |    |                |                |                    |         |
|----|----------------|----------------|--------------------|---------|
| a. | L <sub>Q</sub> | T              | V <sub>exist</sub> |         |
| b. | T              | L <sub>Q</sub> | V <sub>exist</sub> | no data |

As pointed out, furthermore, the Tundra Nenets dialects exhibit differences in formal and functional characteristics of certain interrogative words. On the one hand, differences were observed between the forms of the interrogative pronouns in the Central and Eastern dialects. Additionally, the forms of interrogative adverbs exhibiting place, time and manner readings also vary in the Tundra Nenets dialects. On the other hand, certain structures employ different grammatical characteristic in some dialects:

- (i) The nouns seem to be ellipted from the phrase in the Ob/Ural of the Eastern dialectal group, in which case the case, person/number, etc. suffixes are attached to the interrogative modifier/adjective.
- (ii) In the Central and Western dialects, the noun and its interrogative modifier/complement show agreement in number. While this pattern is not attested in the Eastern dialect.
- (iii) There is also an internal agreement within the nonverbal predicate between the interrogative modifier and the predicate head in verbal person/number marking. This agreement is, however, observed in the Yamal subdialect in the Eastern dialectal group only.

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